

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 070202
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DRAFTED BY H:AHMOSS:RMS
APPROVED BY H - DOUGLAS J. BENNET
DEPUTY SECRETARY (INFO)
S/AB - AMB BUNKER (INFO)
L - MR. HANSELL (INFO)
ARA/PAN - MR. HAAHR (INFO)
S/S-O:LRFLEISCHER
- LEISCHER

-----037135 180508Z /23

O 180347Z MAR 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 070202

EXDIS, FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR, PAN

SUBJECT:LETTER TO GEN TORRIJOS FROM SENS. STONE AND CASE

1. SENATORS STONE AND CASE HAVE ADDRESSED LETTER TO GENERAL TORRIJOS. INTENTION WAS TO BE HELPFUL, TO GET POSITIVE ANSWERS ON RECORD DURING DEBATE. TENOR OF LETTER MAY COMPLICATE ALREADY BAD SITUATION, HOWEVER, AND WE ARE TRYING TO GET SENATORS TO WITHDRAW LETTER OR ACCEPT DELAYED RESPONSE.

2. APPARENTLY AMBASSADOR LEWIS IS CARRYING LETTER AND WE ARE TRYING TO REACH HIM ASKING THAT HE HOLD LETTER UNTIL FURTHER WORD.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 STATE 070202

3. TEXT FOLLOWS:

"DEAR GENERAL TORRIJOS:

LAST NOVEMBER DURING A VISIT BY THE SENATE MAJORITY
LEADER ROBERT BYRD AND THE SENATE MINORITY LEADER

HOWARD BAKER TO PANAMA ALONG WITH THE DELEGATION CONSISTING OF OUR COLLEAGUES SENATORS SARBANES, MATSUNAGA, HUDDLESTON, METZENBAUM, RIEGLE, AND SASSER, YOU PUBLICLY COMMITTED TO

UNDERTAKE SPECIFIC REFORMS ELIMINATING RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND COMMUNICATION IN PANAMA (LAW 343).

ON JANUARY 29, 1978, OUR COLLEAGUE, SENATOR MELCHER, REPORTED THAT, IN A MEETING HE HELD WITH YOU, YOU PROMISED TO STEP DOWN AND TURN YOUR COUNTRY OVER TO CIVILIAN AUTHORITY IF THE UNITED STATES SENATE APPROVES THE PROPOSED PANAMA CANAL TREATIES. YOU WERE ALSO QUOTED AS PROMISING THAT YOU WOULD ONCE AGAIN LEGALIZE ALL POLITICAL PARTIES IN PANAMA AND THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN AUGUST 1978. PRESIDENT CARTER CONFIRMED TO US IN A LETTER DATED JANUARY 27, 1978 THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WOULD TAKE PLACE IN AUGUST. ADDITIONALLY, OUR COLLEAGUE SENATOR GOLDWATER HAS INFORMED US THAT WHEN HE MET WITH YOU HE ASKED YOU TO PERMIT THE RETURN OF EXILES TO PANAMA TO WHICH YOU REPLIED THAT THEY COULD RETURN AT ANY TIME.

IN LIGHT OF THE GOOD FAITH IN WHICH MEMBERS OF THE SENATE WHO ARE DEBATING THESE TREATIES HAVE MET WITH YOU, WE THINK IT EXTREMELY IMPORTANT AND USEFUL THAT YOU CONFIRM TO THE SENATE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE THAT YOU WILL IMMEDIATELY RESTORE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND COMMUNICATIONS IN PANAMA, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 070202

WILL LEGALIZE ALL POLITICAL PARTIES, WILL HOLD NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN 1978 WITH INTERNATIONAL SUPERVISION BY THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES OR ANOTHER RESPECTED INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION, AND WILL ALLOW ALL EXILES TO RETURN TO PANAMA WITH FIRM ASSURANCES FOR THEIR COMPLETE SAFETY AND SECURITY.

WE WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE, SINCE TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE.

SINCERELY,

(SIGNED)

RICHARD (DICK) STONE

CLIFFORD P. CASE END TEXT

(MARCH 15, 1978) VANCE

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NNN

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